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Strange Story of Two Spies

Governments of the Soviet Union and the United States have breached the rule against openly acknowledging the existence or identity of espionage agents. This development is all the more interesting because, quite by coincidence, the exposures occurred at the same time.

Nobody in the United States has doubted that Col. Rudolph Abel, convicted and sentenced in New York in 1957, was a Soviet agent. His trial went unnoticed, however, in Russia. Nor has there ever been doubt that Francis Gary Powers, the U2 pilot shot down over Russia in 1959, was on a mission of photographic spying. President Eisenhower admitted as much, although he never conceded that Mr. Powers was actually employed by the Central Intelligence Agency.

The story of Col. Abel at last has been told on Moscow television, and he is properly held up as a hero to his people. At about the same time it was learned that the CIA also has acknowledged Mr. Powers, presenting him a medal.

These developments are very nearly a fictional sequel to espionage cases that might have come from novels. Col. Abel, a professional agent, and Mr. Powers, a professional flier, never knew each other. Yet their lives are linked forever by the prisoner exchange that restored each man to his family.

Incidentally, the Russian report inferentially suggests that the capture of Col. Abel was a real score for American counter-intelligence. He also spied against the Nazis during World War II, and they never caught him.